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ABSTRACT

Noting that speech communication educators devote little classroom time to the subject of ethics, this paper proposes a framework for the discussion of interpersonal ethics in the classroom setting. The paper first summarizes C. T. Brown and P. W. Keller's work in interpersonal ethics, which places the study of ethics within the democratic tradition, and then defines a contextual ethic as a complement to that view. It next reviews selected material on contextual ethics, and examines the major elements of a contextual interpersonal definition and presents its implications for interpersonal communication theory. (FL)

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# ETHICS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION REVISITED

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ETHICS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION REVISITED

The study of ethics is a standard component in many Speech Communication curriculums. Ethical inquiry is often traced to Aristotle's rhetoric and the Greek democratic tradition, which has influenced the work of Wallace, Haiman, and Nilsen.[1] Recently, the import of ethics in Speech Communication has been reaffirmed by Eubank, Minnick, Howell, and Johannessen.[2] In essence, the study of ethics in Speech Communication has both historic and current support in the discipline.

However, there is a sizable membership in the field who, for one reason or another, spend little actual classroom time with the ethical dimension of the discipline, according to Jensen's 1959 review of teaching ethics in public address[3] and Johnson's 1970 article on ethics in the basic course.[4]

> Jensen's analysis, and these findings, indicate that most speech teachers feel they have a responsibility to discuss with their students the ethical implications of public speaking. However, less than one-third of the instructors surveyed in this study deal with the subject directly as a specific unit of speech instruction. This may indicate that while many teachers believe instruction on ethics is important, the topic lies well down on their list of priorities to be covered. . .[5]

The above observation is in accordance with the author's perception that ethics is given less attention in actual classroom work than seems congruent with supportive teacher attitudes toward its instruction. However, even more disconcerting than the "affirmation of ethics

without instruction" attitude, is the lack of inquiry into the ethics of interpersonal communication.

A decade ago, the discipline struggled with the question, "What is Interpersonal Communication?"[6] Yet, in the intervening period of interpersonal instruction and research, few ethical guidelines for interpersonal communication have been proposed. One can speculate that respect for diversity of approaches placed under the interpersonal label has slowed the impulse to suggest such guidelines. However, variance in what constitutes rhetoric has not stopped individuals in the field from proposing ethical positions for rhetorical discourse, which can be roughly grouped into three categories: Judeo-Christian, democratic, and situational or contextual.[7] In short, the task of discussing interpersonal ethics is complex; but it is manageable, if pursued in the pluralistic tradition of inquiry established by rhetorical investigations of ethics.

The re-examination of the interpersonal ethics question is initiated in this paper, as follows. First, a summary of Brown and Keller's well-known work in interpersonal ethics is provided with a description of how this paper will augment that orientation. Second, a contextual ethic is defined as a complement to the commonly stated democratic approach to interpersonal ethics. Third, selected material on contextual ethics is described, in order to reveal the tradition out of which this paper is grounded. And fourth, the remainder of this paper examines the major elements of a contextual interpersonal definition and some implications of that ethic for interpersonal communication theory.

Brown and Keller

The review of literature in interpersonal ethics is not lengthy. The written material available is primarily limited to the work of Brown and Keller. Brown and Keller's "An Interpersonal Ethic for Communication" (1968)[8] is the lone article in this area,and their Monologue to Dialogue,[9] second edition, (1979), is one of the few interpersonal texts to address ethics directly in chapter format.

Brown and Keller's interpersonal ethic can be placed in the democratic category common to some rhetorical ethical inquiries. In both their 1968 and 1979 works, they quote Thomas Nilsen's summary of important values in a democracy. ". . . A belief in the intrinsic worth of the human personality; a belief in reason as an instrument of individual and social development; self-determination as the means to individual fulfillment; man's fulfillment of his potentialities as a positive good."[10] Brown and Keller do not want to limit the self-determination of another; therefore, they affirm the human as a choice-maker and reject the impulse to use any form of persuasion that might curtail another's freedom.[11]

Brown and Keller's basic proposition is much like the unconditional positive regard stance of Carl Rogers and other advocates of humanistic third force psychology, who would look approvingly on their interpersonal ethic: "A's communication is ethical to the extent that it accepts B's responses; it is unethical to the extent that it is hostile to B's responses, or in some way tries to subjugate B. The ethic can best be put to a test when A discovers that B rejects the message A is sending."[12]

Brown and Keller's interpersonal ethic exemplifies an attitude of openness to the other that does not seek to manipulate or exercise unilateral control. Rather, one invites a mutual control, which implies

an openness to being persuaded while simultaneously making every effort to state and maintain one's own view unless convinced by the other's argument. Their work makes reference to Johannessen's chapter on dialogical ethics that stresses Martin Buber's position of confirming an enemy, even in disagreement. They hypothesize that this ethical position has persuasive appeal, as well as ethical implications. Acceptance of another ensures the strength of his or her self-esteem; and a high self-esteem provides the courage needed to change values when persuaded by a more powerful argument.

Brown and Keller want to avoid nihilism in interpersonal communication theory. They share the concern of Gulley (1970) about the amorality of communication that seeks to manipulate for selfish gain, ignorant of relationship responsibilities.[13] Also, their relationship focus provides an alternative to the concern of Powell and Ary (1977) who see societal implications in the massive use of CB radios that encourage "Communication without Commitment."[14] Their work is a description of democratically rooted "values" and "attitudes" that they feel should undergird and motivate "ethical" interpersonal communication. A final quotation reveals their concern for speaker/listener "attitudes."

> . . . the ethics of communication may have more to do with signs concerning the attitude of the speaker and the listener toward each other than with elements of the message or channel involved. It may be that the central question in ethics does not concern so much one's loyalty to rationality, or cosmic truth, as it does loyalty to the person with whom one is in communication. The crucial question may be: <u>How does the speaker react to the listener's reaction?</u> (And how does the listener react to the speaker?)[15]

The work of Brown and Keller is an important step in understanding interpersonal ethics in a democratic tradition. They initiated dialogue

concerning a useful foundation for an interpersonal ethic. Yet, as rhetorical inquiry has revealed, other ethical bases are available to complement and, at times, contrast the democratic world-view. In keeping with this pluralistic tradition of ethical investigation, this paper describes a contextual ethic for interpersonal communication. In addition, this paper examines the ethical presuppositions of interpersonal communication concepts, as a complement to Brown and Keller's concentration on attitudes. This paper is not to be viewed as a critique of the work advanced by Brown and Keller. Rather, this paper is offered as an additional perspective, which at a later time when more research has been completed in both areas, may be helpful in a comparison study.

A Contextual Ethic Defined

A contextual ethic has been suggested by a number of individuals from the rhetorical part of the discipline. This orientation has been called a situational sensitivity and has generated interesting debate in the field, as revealed by the Bitzer, Patton, Tompkins, and Vatz exchanges in "The Forum" section of Quarterly Journal of Speech.[16] A situational or contextual perspective is admittedly difficult to define; no a priori justification or motivation is acceptable from a contextual approach to ethics. However, such a perspective need not be associated with nihilism and complete relativism. The establishment of tentative boundaries for ethical actions and decisions in interpersonal communication can be consistent with a contextual approach.

The following story is illustrative of the complexity of the interpersonal communication ethics question and the contextual nature of many ethical evaluations and judgments. A graduate school acquaintance of the

author's willingly and openly shared his painful past with any available listener. This man's revelations were honest and accurate, but they were still considered unethical by others. He was never conscious of the contextual requirements of ethical self-disclosure. He was not sensitive to the relationship between himself and his listener, the physical setting, or the timing of his disclosures. He would locate strangers, corner people in bathrooms, and interrupt birthday parties to share his hard luck story. He was relationship insensitive.

Yet, what is fascinating is that any of the above actions could have been ethical, depending on the context. One can imagine situations where sharing with a stranger would be ethical, when interrupting a birthday party in order to find a listener would be appropriate; and, yes, even situations where an in-depth conversation with someone in the bathroom would be ethically necessary. Thus, what is ethical often depends on one's perception of the contextual requirements or as Hart and others suggest, a rhetorical sensitivity. In accordance with this view, this paper is grounded in the assumption that one's perception of what is ethically appropriate in a given interpersonal communication context is influenced by one's openness to transactional information about self and other and a sensitive search for the "valuable good"[17] consequence, whether or not in accordance with the notions of self-actualization and expression of human feelings.

The goal of the above definition is to avoid two extreme positions frequently associated with a contextual perspective. First, for the purpose of this paper, the definition of contextual ethics emphasizes transaction and perception in hopes of escaping a deterministic theory, associated by some with Bitzer's orientation. And second, this definition stresses that

one's value system can propel one into action that may not be of direct benefit to self, in an effort to secure the "valuable good," placing a contextual ethic on grounds other than personal subjectivity. In short, the above definition attempts to avoid both subjectivistic and objectivistic reifications of an ethic for interpersonal communication.[18] Before venturing further to define key concepts in a contextual interpersonal ethic, an examination of other contextual theories seeking to avoid the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism is appropriate.

Contextual Ethics: Selected Sources

An ethical system that resides neither in subjectivistic nor objectivistic principles has been detailed in a number of works by Maurice Friedman. He speaks of such an alternative as an ethical "touchstone."[19] One allows a belief to govern actions, but is open to changing viewpoints, if persuaded by the other's argument. One's ethical system is established, but open to change in the context of the moment, which is in contrast to both dogma and relativism, void of tradition and stance. This contextual approach or "touchstone" does not view the meaning of activities "in the event" or "in the person," but rather in the transaction between event and person.

Such a contextual approach that challenges objectivism and relativism is present in some definitions of rhetorical ethics. The objectivistic premise has been challenged by individuals in our field who no longer claim rationality as sacrosanct. They assert the impossibility of locating a premise that can fit situations of similar communication, which, if only followed in a logical manner, would lead one to the appropriate resolution or decision.[20] Ralph Eubanks, in a recent article

on ethics, describes the difference between doing something on principle or premise alone (deontological), and doing the "valuable good" which may not conform to "prescriptive" values. He shares the following illustration.

> 'When Guatama Buddha left his wife and child for the sake of the good, he violated a rule of right action. He broke a promise. He was being unethical, which he sadly sensed, though it was his genius to fulfill his duty in but one of its dimensions, the axiological.' We must not fail to notice that while the deontic theorist hitches obligation to purity of motive, the teleologist hitches it to the production of good consequences.[21]

It is the "valuable good," not blind adherence to principle, that a contextual ethic seeks. Yet, the search for the "valuable good" is not relativistic. In fact, one can only approximate the discovery of the "valuable good" where tradition or value system is in tension with the demands of the moment. Witness the prototype of such a struggle in the character, Tevye, in "Fiddler on the Roof," as he sang, "Tradition, tradition," and eventually was tempered by the demands of changing times--an alteration of his matchmaker role. Paul Keller speaks of this play in a description of Martin Buber's narrow ridge, which, like the ethic in this paper, is suggested as an alternative to relativistic and objectivistic communicative positions.

> The writer of "Fiddler on the Roof" caught the essence and struggle of the narrow ridge. In this drama there is a universal message as Tevye, the beleaguered father of that family, is constantly torn between tradition and the modern ideas of his growing daughters. . . .
>
> The thing that brings tears to our eyes in that play--the thing that makes Tevye believable--is that he walks the narrow ridge. If he were rigid, absolute, and unfeeling he would be nothing but a buffoon--a bearded Archie Bunker. The narrow ridge he walks between is concern for his own tradition and his daughters' love for their men. His struggle allows us to see the difficulty of decision, the suffering that is sometimes present as one adopts such an interpersonal style. It is his suffering; the intense agony caused by the tension between love and responsibility, that makes us identify with him.[22]

Another position akin to the "valuable good" is suggested by Gadamer in discussion of Aristotle's Ethics. Gadamer contends that Aristotle's ethics are a criticism of Platonic idealism as an empty category. Aristotle is concerned with the question of the "humanly good," which is discovered in the final moment of action--not by a mathematician's logic. Yet, experience of the moment is not enough either. One must be prepared, in order to make the most of a given situation. There is a curious tension between training and the experience of the concrete moment.[23]

Eubanks' claim of the "valuable good" and Gadamer's "humanly good" are contextual alternatives to both a rationality that insensitively structures life's happenings into logical syllogisms and a weak-kneed relativism of nonjudgment. Similar concerns were advanced by Brembeck and Howell in their persuasion text. Recently, Howell restated his belief in contextual ethics that provide some elasticity between "prescriptive" and "descriptive" ethical responses. He even described all codes of ethics as unethical, if no flexibility is present.[24] Johannesen further supports the point in reference to an essay by Minnick. "'Minnick is really taking an absolute and a relative ethical stand. . .'"[25] The position of the above persons is that some guidelines are needed in ethical decisions, but one must simultaneously remain flexible to the contextual needs of the moment. They are not suggesting a form of relativism or nihilism; rather, their concern is that many ethical problems can only be resolved in the moment of decision.

Perhaps adherence to the above perspective is what caused Carl Rogers to state that a person can sometimes be congruent, empathic, display unconditional positive regard, and have the other perceive such warmth, and

yet fail to be of assistance to that person. Rogers' legitimate fear is the turning of his theoretical stance into a technique.[26] He recognizes the problem of equating syllogistic logic with what occurs in therapy. There must be some room to maneuver according to the needs of the context. As Eubanks states, our culture is infatuated with technique in the study of the human.[27] His assertion is supported by Martin Buber in his classic statement on our fetish for technique or ready answers.

> For the attentive man would no longer, as his custom is, 'master' the situation. . . Moreover, nothing that he believed he possessed as always available would help him, no knowledge and no technique, no system and no programme; for now he would have to do with what cannot be classified, with concretion itself.[28]

Such contextual flexibility is not to be viewed as just another call to relativism. The importance of training is affirmed as valuable; however, one should not become locked into one particular ethical stance. Such stagnation turns ethics into a monologue, according to Buber, or objectifies a belief system which is in opposition to the unique non-interchangeable focus of interpersonal writers such as John Stewart.[29]

Perhaps the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer can further dispel the notion of relativism as the foundation of this approach. Bonhoeffer was an internationally known pacifist during pre-World War II. He spoke and taught in numerous American universities on this issue and other theological points of interest. Yet, he saw the context of World War II as a call to forsake the pacifist position and collaborate to assasinate Hitler. Such an action did not necessarily mean that he had totally left his former belief system; rather, it implied an ethical flexibility similar to Eubanks' thesis on Buddha seeking the "valuable good" in opposition to principle.

One final example draws the issue of flexibility without relativism into even clearer focus. A young man described the horror of his little daughter dying of a blood disease. As she was choking on her own blood, the nurses placed cotton balls in her throat to absorb the fluid. As she had no hope of living through the night, her father allowed the cotton balls to be removed, that she could die less painfully in the following moments. The father held her hand and agonized as she suffocated from her own blood. The father certainly operated on the premise that one must save one's child at all costs. However, in this context, he had to alter a guiding principle to the requirements of that tragic moment. He recognized the necessity of flexibility in one's ethical system in order to meet the difficulties of the concrete moment.

With the above discussion of a contextual approach as a background, the remainder of the paper explores the following themes: (1) the implications of a transactional approach to communication for a contextual interpersonal ethic; (2) the search for the "valuable good," which may be at odds with one's own desires; and, in addition, three propositions derived from a contextual ethic are explored.

Transaction

The emphasis on transaction in interpersonal communication has been emphasized by numerous persons in Speech Communication literature. Stewart, Darnell, Laing, Smith and Williamson, and Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, and Williams have all described the transactional perspective, to name a few.[30] Stewart defines transaction as follows:

> . . . a transaction is an event in which <u>who we are</u> (our 'existence and nature') emerges out of the event itself. Human communication is that kind of event. Human communication

> is transactional. Wherever humans communicate, part of what's going on is that each is defining himself or herself in relation to the other persons involved. . . Obviously this defining process has some limits.[31]

Stewart goes on to describe some of the physical limits of a transaction. But the limits can be pushed even further, as revealed by his inclusion of the Boulding article, "The Image." Boulding states that we are located or situated in space, time, emotions, and personal relationships and through this filter, knowledge about our world is made available to us via transaction of self and world.[32]

The transactional approach is an integral part of a contextual perspective; it incorporates a range of ingredients that affect our communication with others. In no way is it an absolutistic perspective--to change one of the dimensions detailed by Boulding is to alter the communication at hand. For instance, as changes occur in a transaction between parent and child, the definition of the participants in that exchange will also be altered. A good parent is sensitive to the timing of when to shift from protector to supervisor to co-adult--to name a few of the different definitions appropriate to changing circumstances.

A transactional perspective is grounded in change--as perceptions of oneself and others change, the relational pattern of the transaction is altered. If one of the components of the situation is modified, self and other definitions are affected. Thus, Proposition One of a contextual interpersonal ethic is that one must be open to information resulting from changing definitions of self and other. However, openness to changing definitions does not necessarily imply acceptance of those definitions, but only an attempt to understand the other's perceptual world. From a transactional view of a contextual ethic, one is open to new information

that can affect the transaction, but one need not concur with the other's perception. Awareness, not necessarily acceptance, is the key.

This leads to a difference between interpersonal communication theory rooted in a democratic tradition, such as Carl Rogers' psychology, and a contextual perspective. The self-definition stance referred to above can be called a role-conscious approach, which is at odds with Rogers' viewpoint. In a recorded Carl Rogers/Martin Buber dialogue, Rogers asserted that he attempts to function oblivious of roles in a counseling situation. Buber stated disagreement with this position. If a person comes to a counselor for help, the counselor should recognize the demands of his/her role and act accordingly.[33] Based on the above definition of role-consciousness, Rogers' position at first glance may appear unethical. But upon closer examination, both Rogers' and Buber's perspectives are quite ethical in a role-conscious framework. Rogers is open to the client's definition of the exchange as one between helpee and helper, but he holds to his definition of the activity as a deep sharing between two persons. As a counselor, he only needs to attempt to be aware of the other's perceptions of role definitions; he need not abide by them. He recognizes that such information may be of value in interpreting some of the client's actions. On the other hand, if a practitioner of Rogerian counseling functioned without regard for the client's definition of the roles, an unethical exchange would be given birth, because he/she is closing out information important to the exchange. Thus, even if one attempts to forgo a hierarchial role-conscious communication style of communication, it can be ethically on target, as long as one is open to the other's perception of roles involved. This author does not view

Rogers and Buber as far apart as their exchange indicated. They are aware of role differences, however; one is willing to accept the client's definition and the other is not. But, both function under the awareness of the transactional power of roles in communication. Thus, Proposition One could be restated as a role consciousness where one seeks to interpret one's responsibilities in a given context, by being sensitive to information announced by role perceptions.

The "Valuable Good"

In the search for anything as illusive as the "valuable good," one must contend with two primary guides--one's own value system and the issue or ethical decision under consideration. Such information does not emerge, of course, out of a vacuum. It is gathered through the transaction process; new transactions may alter value systems and perceptions of the issue under discussion. Granted, it is difficult to alter a lifelong self-perception in relation to a particular issue, but it can occur in the contextual search for the "valuable good" in interpersonal communication.

As indicated earlier, the study of ethical issues in Speech Communication is frequently rooted in traditional democratic values. In interpersonal communication, this is usually manifested in theories that affirm the individual, as revealed by such concepts as non-interchangeability, unconditional positive regard, confirmation, and the emphasis on the relationship aspect of communication. In an article by Ilardo, "Why Interpersonal Communication?," Patton and Giffin are quoted in support of interpersonal as a humanizing force, not a means to a predetermined goal.

> Interpersonal Communication 'places much greater emphasis on the desire to relate to other persons. . . In addition, new

> emphasis is placed on understanding those human needs which a person tries to satisfy through interaction with others...'[34]

The focus on the importance of the individual parallels Nilsen's self-realization of a citizen as a primary responsibility of a democratic culture. This orientation is akin to the work of Rogers, which has been called the finest American contribution to psychology, because it promotes the values of individuality and freedom. The interpersonal facet of Speech Communication has largely adopted this goal or value by promoting the well-being of the individual through a relational approach to human communication.

A situational approach is grounded in a value, but it may sometimes be in contrast to the above. A contextual ethic of interpersonal communication requires doing what one perceives as appropriate to meet the requirements of Eubanks' notion of the "valuable good." It does not recognize the growth of another human being as the sole guiding principle. In rare cases, a contextual ethic may require one to act in such a way as to limit a person's ability to grow or prosper.[35] For instance, if one has a colleague who is professionally not competent and is not fulfilling responsibilities to students, firing may be in order. One may not be able to promote the colleague's growth, but may feel more inclined toward preventing that individual from wasting the time and money of a great number of persons.

Certainly, I am not suggesting that the individual be ignored or that self-realization be totally forgotten as a guiding possibility--the importance of the person should always be an important consideration. But, from a contextual ethic perspective, the importance of the individual can be overstressed. Thus, Proposition Two of a contextual interpersonal

ethic is that the well-being of the individuals involved in an interpersonal exchange be supported, if at all possible; however, when the "good" decision requires that an individual sacrifice or both persons give up something important, such action should be considered. As Abraham Maslow regretted in his last book, the importance of the individual has been over-stressed to the exclusion of the group.[36] Good decisions require going with the proposal of one person, both persons, or on occasion, neither. In short, the other's self-actualization or one's own can not always be affirmed in the pursuit of the best option.

Philip Slater, a leading writer against the excesses of individualistic seeking of self-realization, states this concern in Earthwalk and in his new edition of The Pursuit of Loneliness. He contends that the importance of free choice has been over-stated, as the following quotation reveals.

> People in our society are indoctrinated from birth with the notion that personal choice is an unqualified boon to humankind--that all our ills derive from the persistence of obstacles to its fullest realization. Yet rats, faced with the choice between a healthy diet and saccharine will select the latter and starve to death, and the frantic buying activity that Americans exhibit is perhaps the same phenomenon.[37]

Slater contends with the work of David Riesman, a sophisticated proponent of individualism, by quoting Jay Haley's assertion that excessive individualism is a step toward schizophrenic behavior. According to Haley, communication is "rule" governed[38]; to seek total independence is to ignore what Haley and recent work in our own discipline imply with a transactional "rules" perspective. Slater's point is not the establishment of an authoritative regime, but the recognition of our interdependence, an important foundational premise of transactionalism.

Certainly the pursuit of some sort of contextual "valuable good" ethic opens the door to significant problems, such as a Hitler who believes in mass murder as contributing to "good," or another Jim Jones who sees all individualism as evil. Just as self-realization pushed to the extreme becomes negative, so does a contextual ethic. But, the contextual ethic is open to a person saying, "We are not emphasizing the individual enough"--thus allowing for adjustments. At this point in our history, Slater contends that the needed adjustment requires curtailing of individualism. He argues that the individualistic ethic has permitted "one-sixteenth of the earth's population . . . to consume about a third of its energy and half its resources."[39] Even though limiting freedom may sound unpatriotic and totalitarian, it may be more humane than the legitimizing of the misuse of human resources by a few to the exclusion of many.

A contextual ethic affirms the importance of the person, but does not see the individual's growth as sacrosanct. At times, one may need to actually suffer in order to allow a "good" decision to be implemented. Viktor Frankl, well known for his suffering/meaning thesis, describes Nazi concentration camp prisoners doing what was needed for a "good" action to be given birth, even when they themselves might have had to make significant sacrifices. More commonly, a parent may have to stay up with a sick child, when he or she, as an individual, will suffer from a lack of sleep the next day. In short, the "valuable good" action seeks to aid both self and other, but is willing to by-pass this goal, if necessary, in the pursuit of the "valuable good."

Interpersonal communication literature has almost uniformly affirmed the importance of emotion. Feelings have been given attention to a degree

formerly unheard of in the Speech Communication discipline. As Bochner and Kelly stated in an early symposium on interpersonal instruction, communication between persons needs to permit the free flowing exchange of human emotions.[40] Although emotive communication has been generally affirmed by interpersonal theorists, it has not always been fully accepted in Speech Communication ranks. Traditionally, the ethic of emotional appeals has been questioned by public address teachers and researchers.

In response to the above criticism, the Final Proposition of this paper is as follows: One should be aware of one's emotions, but emotions cannot be the sole guide for behavior from a contextual orientation. At times, in order to address an issue or concern, the "valuable good" response requires one to do what does not feel emotionally good. It is certainly more comfortable to have a "good" response coincide with one's emotions, but this cannot always be the case. For example, Tom's wife had been ill for three years. He has felt no relief from enormous responsibility during that time. He does not always feel like being helpful, but feels a "good" response necessitates such commitment and action. In fact, had he followed his feelings, he would have walked out.

Consider another example where the "valuable good" response to the issue at hand did not permit the following of one's internal feelings. Suppose a woman is deeply in love with her alcoholic husband, and feels that she should stay with him. However, the "good" response may require her to leave and force him to confront the issue in a forthright fashion. In short, emotions cannot be one's sole guide in the pursuit of the "valuable good."

Conclusion

Interpersonal communication theory rooted in a contextual ethic is in line with current viewpoints, but simultaneously divergent. It is grounded in a transactional perspective, which is currently accepted by many in the field. However, a contextual ethic does not affirm the individual or feelings as the sole guide of interpersonal conduct. Thus, a contextual ethic does not recognize "self-actualization" and "getting in touch with one's feelings" as the primary function of interpersonal communication.

The individual sometimes needs affirmation and feelings should be expressed, but not always. Sometimes an individual's aspiration needs to be sacrificed for the betterment of others or a cause. Take for instance, the employment of a minority over a white male of equal competence. Hiring may not even permit the following of one's own feelings--the "valuable good" for a particular organization may not coincide with the selection of a competent friend, because he or she may not be totally suited for the task.

A contextual ethic is, according to Howell, "descriptive," in contrast to the "prescriptive" democratic ethic for interpersonal communication. The democratic ethic is affirmed by the author as an ideal of significant merit and worthy of guiding actions whenever possible. However, at times, difficult decisions require the context to be a major guide for behavior. In such an instance, one attempts to be open to information resulting from the transaction between the participants, one's own value system and the issue at hand, in hopes of locating a "valuable good," although probably not a perfect decision. However, as stated previously, such decision-making is not dogmatic or relativistic. A contextual ethic

will not permit just any response. Transaction by definition is unique. Each contextual transaction between one's value system and the issue will be unique, and simultaneously there will be commonality in each response, as well. Each unique transaction still includes one's own value system and one's perceptual world-view, making for consistency between responses.

Perhaps a contextual ethic can be summarized with an analogy from Zorba the Greek. In contemplation, Zorba asked Boss, "Should I live life as if I will never die or should I live life as if I will die tomorrow?" The companion question in interpersonal communication is whether one should live by a democratic ideal or just respond to the moment. The answer from a contextual ethic seems to require doing both. The context requires life to be lived as if one will never die and, at times, one must live for the moment. One's interpersonal decisions can sometimes be made by a democratic ideal. However, sometimes a less perfect contextual transaction between participants needs to guide communicative behavior, as one searches for the "valuable good" interpersonal decision.

FOOTNOTES

[1]See, for example, Thomas R. Nilsen, Ethics of Speech Communication (New York: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1974); Franklin S. Haiman, "Democratic Ethics and the Hidden Persuaders," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 44 (1958), pp. 385-392; and Karl R. Wallace, "An Ethical Basis of Communication," The Speech Teacher, 4 (1955), pp. 1-9.

[2]Ralph Eubanks, "Reflections on the Moral Dimension of Communication," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 45 (1980), pp. 297-3[illegible]; William Howell, Presentation on Ethics at Speech Association of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, September (1980); Richard L. Johannesen, Ethics in Human Communication, (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press, 1980); Richard L. Johannesen, "Richard M. Weaver on Standards for Ethical Rhetoric," Central States Speech Journal, 29 (1979), pp. 127-137; and Wayne Minnick, "A New Look at the Ethics of Persuasion," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 45 (1980), pp. 352-363.

[3]J. Vernon Jensen, "An Analysis of Recent Literature on Teaching Ethics in Public Address," Speech Teacher, 8 (1959), pp. 219-228.

[4]Robert C. Johnson, "Teaching Speech Ethics in the Beginning Speech Course," Speech Teacher, 19 (1970), pp. 58-61.

[5]Johnson, p. 60.

[6]See, for example, Joseph A. Ilardo, "Why Interpersonal Communication?" Speech Teacher, 21 (1972), pp. 1-6.

[7]For an interesting discussion of classifying of ethical standards, see James W. Chesebro, "A Construct for Assessing Ethics in Communication," Central States Speech Journal, 20 (1969), pp. 104-114.

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